A Passport to the Future for First Generation College Students

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Abstract

Applying to college can be a daunting task especially when you do not know how to start the application process. As a first-generation student, applying for college can be even more intimidating without the proper guidance. In East Los Angeles, the number of people with a bachelor's degree or higher is considerably low and the 40% of the community is foreign born. In this paper, we will propose Passport to the Future, an innovative program designed with first generation students in mind to assist in the college application process. This program will not only provide workshops but high school outreach, college night events, and collaboration with local colleges and universities. We will outline the need for the program, what we propose the program should entail, a line-item budget, and the rationale for implementing the program. It is our hope that more first-generation students will enter college with the certainty they can accomplish a four-year degree with the information they will gain from the program.

A Passport to the Future for First Generation Students

The East Los Angeles Library is part of the Los Angeles County Library system. East Los Angeles is historically a cultural hub where immigrants from across the world settled in the area (Los Angeles County Library, n.d.). Russians, Jews, Japanese, and Mexicans had a strong presence in the early 1900's. By the beginning of World War II, East Los Angeles was primarily a Latino community. Although the surrounding community has changed throughout the years, East Los Angeles has kept its Mexican American charm the last 60 years (Los Angeles County Library, n.d.). According to the Census, the population is primarily made up of Hispanics. This is evident in the library's use of bilingual signage in English and Spanish. However, the library focuses on the entire community by offering several cultural resource centers. 41% of the community reported being foreign born and only 8.3% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Bureau, n.d.). From this data, we can deduce that resources are lacking for first generation students seeking to attend college and universities.

Overview

The transition from high school to college or university can be overwhelming especially when you do not know where to begin with the school application process. Some schools require entrance exams and students need to figure out how to finance a college education on top of everything else. If there was a place where first generation high school juniors and seniors in East Los Angeles could go to workshops to learn how to navigate through the admissions process, the number of the people in the community with a bachelor's degree or higher could greatly increase. The first step would be to create a program that offers these vital resources to this population. We created a program called Passport to the Future. It would not only offer workshops on the admissions process, but also Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and American

College Testing (ACT) prep, financial aid, and information for *Dreamers*. It will conduct outreach at the local high schools to introduce the program and provide marketing through the use of a social media campaign. Flyers will be posted throughout the campuses and library to advertise what the program will offer. Detailed information about the program would also be available on the library website. Providing these resources would be a much-needed start for first generation students to enter college that would open doors for a successful career in academia.

Need/Problem to Address

The initial overview of programs provided by the East Los Angeles Library is filled with multiple projects that meet the needs of the diverse community; however, there is an identifiable necessity that was recognized upon reviewing their programs and services. As stated earlier, the library has a vibrant community focused on diversity and their cultural resource centers; on the other hand, programs specifically promoting or educating students on a path to a college education is not easily accessible. At first glance on the website, you will find a tab directing you to a digital library that has an incredible resource called the Learning Express Library, which provides several college prep tutorials and guidance. Although commendable in its effort, it is hidden and can come across as overwhelming with very little direction or guidance.

The library is located in the heart of Los Angeles and is within a 25-mile radius of universities including University of Southern California (USC), University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), California State University Los Angeles (CSULA), Whittier College, California State University Long Beach (CSULB), California Institute of Technology (CIT), as well East Los Angeles Community College (ELAC), Rio Hondo College (RHC), and Pasadena City College (PCC). It is also part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) which includes James A. Garfield Senior High School and Monterey Continuation High School. The 2018-19 demographic and performance data from Garfield High reported 36% of their graduates

enrolled in a 4 or 2 year college with 68.8% of their graduates meeting the University of California/California State University (UC-CSU) entrance requirements; Monterey High reported 0% of their graduates enrolled in a 4 year college and 29% enrolled in a 2 year college with no reports of any students meeting UC-CSU entrance requirements (LAUSD, n.d.-a,b). According to the California School Dashboard Academic Performance for Monterey High, only 23.5% were classified as "approaching prepared" under the college/career category (California School Dashboard, n.d.).

Other alarming statistics include those in the LAUSD District Scorecard and the Early Assessment Program (EAP). The 2015 LAUSD District Scorecard records the performance of all schools within the district. When measured by the (EAP), which measures whether juniors in high school are ready for college-level English and mathematics, only 14% of students demonstrated college preparedness in English language arts and only 5% demonstrated college preparedness in mathematics; furthermore, 39% of advanced placement (AP) exams received a qualifying score of a 3 or higher and 41% of high school students were on track for A-G college requirements with a C average (LAUSD, n.d.). LAUSD 2016-19 milestone targets for the 2018-19 school year Destination Graduation goal includes preparing students for college, career, and life. Three of the four indicators state 43% of students have a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) or above, 61% have completed the SAT or ACT and a staggering 94% self-reported their lack of aspiration to seek a higher education (LAUSD, n.d.).

The numbers tell a story. A large percentage of students are not seeking higher education and when prepared, a fraction of students are applying to colleges. Passport to the Future will support students with guided steps towards college preparedness, continued academic support while in high school, and help provide a pathway to increase their opportunities to submit an application to a university of their choice. We believe we can do more to help students achieve

their goals. Research indicates that, "as the country's demographics and student enrollment in postsecondary education continues to grow, understanding ways to support parents/families is and will continue to be necessary" (Amaro-Jimenez, et. al., 2020).

Motivation is key and in particular with the ability to inspire students to take the next step with higher education. Passport to the Future would provide the platform for community involvement on many levels. A solution in meeting the need of providing a pathway to college would serve the community in terms of building a plan for a future for many students who are identified as first-generation college students. Although the library has an excellent selection of college resources, applying and getting accepted into a university takes more than completing tutorials or taking the SAT or ACT. Students are in need of direct instruction on how to walk through the application process, apply for scholarships, write essays, maintain their GPA while in high school, and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). Other important decisions students need to make include selecting the right college and determining how to approach selecting a major. Our program will go beyond tutorials and bring a community together to partner with students, parents, and community leaders to navigate the path to a successful college experience. Researchers agree that students and families benefit from knowing what opportunities they have access to and "outreach efforts should put students and families at the center so that they can choose the path that is best for them" (Amaro-Jimenez et. al., 2020).

Budget

An approximate budget for the total cost of marketing, workshops, outreach and college preparation expenses are listed in Table 1. Further discussion on the budget will be included within the rationale section.

Table 1

Program	Item	Cost
Marketing	Printer - HP LaserJet Pro M479fdw	$600
Marketing	500 one sided flyers from printing lab	$160
Marketing	Paper- for 250 sheets	$15
Marketing	240 Pens	$17
Marketing	Paper cutter	$40
Marketing	Ink (regular printer)	$75
Marketing	4 colored Ink for 6,000 pages	$940
Marketing	Website development website analytics report	$15
Marketing	Part-Time Social Media Manager	$25,000
Workshops	Part- Time Financial Aid Advisor	$25,000
Workshops	Part-Time Dreamers Act Advisor	$25,000
Workshops	Part-Time Cal State LA Academic Advisors	$26,000
Outreach	Part-Time Librarian	$21,000
College Preparation	Part-Time SAT/ACT Tutor	$15,120

Rationale

Introducing first generation students to the possibilities of higher education is the first step in getting them prepared for the college road ahead. The marketing and outreach behind

Passport to the Future are critical. We are factoring the cost of a part-time librarian whose job will include presenting the opportunities afforded by Passport to the Future to high school juniors and seniors. This will be done by attending student assemblies and giving presentations during homeroom at the local high schools. This individual will be tasked with obtaining sign-up information in order for students to be contacted by the library and local college advisors for upcoming workshops and programs. A budget will be set for the cost of materials such as paper, pens, ink, a printer, and a paper cutter. Flyers will be provided on site during the presentations and posted throughout campuses as well as at the library and library website. Additionally, a small budget will be allocated for website development as the East Los Angeles Public Library already has an active website, we would need a professional to add a tab with Passport to the Future information and keep it up to date.

Another form of marketing that will be leveraged is social media. A part-time social media manager will be included in the budget to create a social media presence on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. This tool will help Passport to the Future engage with local students and community members who may wish to partake in the college journey. Instructional videos and short reels on the college application process can be shared, as well as announcements, and special posts congratulating students who have been accepted to college thanks to the program.

The library will be providing workshops on SAT and ACT prep, college course requirements, the college application process, applying for financial aid, and information for *Dreamers*. The library will invest the bulk of its budget for part-time advisors. Although the library will be partnering up with local colleges in the area for college nights and financial aid, academic advisors will need to be compensated for their time with students. We determined that it is best for the sake of the library's budget, to hire this staff on a part-time basis as student availability may only include after school and weekend sessions. College advisors will help

bridge the gap between students and college admittance. They will provide valuable resources with one-on-one interaction for students seeking to obtain a higher education. It will make the path for first generation students that much clearer, removing the barriers that often plague incoming college freshmen.

This budget also includes a SAT/ACT tutor which will be available on site for 3-hour group sessions from 9am-noon on Saturday and 1pm-4pm on Sunday. The budget for this program seeks to maximize the impact of college preparation for first generation students who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree or higher. We found that there is a significant gap in the number of individuals that pursue a higher education after high school. We attribute this to the lack of resources in the underrepresented community of East Los Angeles. We believe that $138,982 is a small investment that will generate large returns in the community and will contribute to their upward mobility.

Conclusion

To quote Malcolm X, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." Wise words to follow, which is why we have chosen to name the program Passport to the Future. By providing the resources we have presented, it will give first generation students an opportunity they otherwise might not have had. The need is evident in the East Los Angeles community, and our hope is for the program to move first generation students into their future of higher education and beyond.

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